

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 15, 2007

The Honorable Alberto Gonzales
U.S. Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

We are writing to request that you provide prompt answers to disturbing questions about the Department of Justice's handling of consent decrees with ConocoPhillips delaying its compliance with pollution cleanup rules, as well as other activity related to apparent conflicts of interest involving recently resigned Assistant Attorney General Sue Ellen Wooldridge. The information contained in recent press reports suggests potential unethical, if not illegal, conduct by a senior Justice Department official and, even more disturbing, apparent complicity in such behavior by the Department.

Specifically, recent press reports indicate that shortly before her resignation in January as head of the Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division, Ms. Wooldridge approved and signed consent decrees that included delays of two to three years for ConocoPhillips to significantly reduce emissions causing pollution. Yet nine months earlier, Ms. Wooldridge purchased a \$1 million vacation home with ConocoPhillips Vice President and top lobbyist Donald Duncan. As presidential appointments expert Paul Light of New York University has commented, this conduct by Ms. Wooldridge "creates the impression of favoritism, or favors due", and "political appointees have been indicted for less."

Several additional factors create even more concerns. According to one report, the home purchase was cleared in advance by Department of Justice ethics officials. And one report suggests that while Ms. Wooldridge did not recuse herself from the ConocoPhillips litigation, she did orally recuse herself from matters involving clients of a third co-owner of the \$1 million vacation home, J. Steven Griles.

The Honorable Alberto Gonzales
Page Two
February 15, 2007

This is a matter of serious concern to the House Judiciary Committee, which is charged with oversight responsibility over the Department, as well as to the entire House Democratic Caucus. Accordingly, we ask for prompt answers to the following questions, along with copies of any documents relating thereto:

- Was Ms. Wooldridge's vacation home purchase in fact cleared by Department officials?
- If so, how, when, and by whom? Were documents and written materials provided by her? Were there also conversations involving her and Department officials? Please provide a copy of any written clearance and related documents.
- Was the clearance limited to the specific home purchase, or did it also allow Ms. Wooldridge to participate fully in future Department matters involving ConocoPhillips, including the consent decrees?
- What criteria were used with respect to the clearance, and how does the process and criteria used compare to that utilized with respect to other Department employees? Please identify and provide information and documents with respect to any other Department employee provided with ethical clearance under comparable circumstances.
- What explanation by Ms. Wooldridge or other information exists concerning why she allegedly recused herself from matters concerning clients of the other vacation home co-owner, Mr. Griles, but not those of Mr. Duncan?
- Please provide copies of all documents relating to the ConocoPhillips consent decrees, particularly any documents sent to, copied to, or sent by Ms. Wooldridge.

In addition, questions have been raised concerning Ms. Wooldridge's relationship with Mr. Griles, who is a target of the Department's public corruption investigation involving convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Just before her resignation from the Department of Justice, Ms. Wooldridge reportedly amended financial disclosure documents indicating that she had failed to properly report a number of expensive gifts she and Mr. Griles exchanged in 2003 and 2004. It has been reported that you and other top Department officials were unaware of Ms. Wooldridge's romantic relationship with Mr. Griles until months after she had been confirmed to her position in the Department, long after Department prosecutors had begun investigating Mr. Griles. And while it has been reported that Ms. Wooldridge orally recused herself from matters involving Mr. Griles' clients, she reportedly did not mention this alleged recusal or her relationship with Mr. Griles in answers to the Senate in connection with her Department nomination. In connection with these serious concerns, please provide answers to the following questions, along with copies of any documents related thereto:

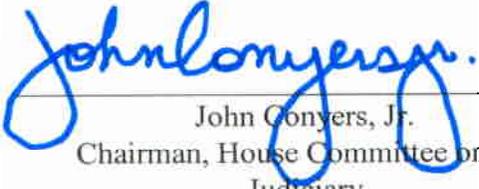
- Did the alleged oral recusal by Ms. Wooldridge take place?
- If so, when, and to whom and how was it communicated?

The Honorable Alberto Gonzales
Page Three
February 15, 2007

- What was the scope of the recusal, including whether it included other companies with the same interests as Mr. Griles' clients?
- How did the handling of this apparently oral recusal compare with standard Department policy and practice concerning recusals?
- When did you or other senior Department officials become aware of Ms. Wooldridge's close relationship with a target of a Department public corruption investigation and what action, if any, was taken as a result?

In addition to the significant ethical questions discussed above, concerns have been raised about the enforcement actions taken or not taken by the Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division, especially during Ms. Wooldridge's tenure, and the House Judiciary Committee intends to pursue such concerns as well. As part of those oversight efforts, however, it is crucial that answers and documents related to the serious questions raised above concerning Ms. Wooldridge's conduct at the Department of Justice be provided as soon as possible. Please respond at your earliest convenience, and in any event no later than March 1, through the Judiciary Committee office, 2138 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington DC 20515.

Sincerely,



John Conyers, Jr.
Chairman, House Committee on the
Judiciary



Rahm Emanuel
Chairman, House Democratic Caucus